

New board takes on Elders Council

Luke Horton
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Tim Gumbleton and John Andrews (far left and far right) from RSM Bird Cameron with new Dunghutti Elders Council directors Esther Quinlin, William O'Brien, Betty Champion, Heather Ritchie (Anderson) and Andrea Douglas. Absent are board members Bob Mumbler and Elizabeth Cohen.

TODAY heralds a new era for the members of the Dunghutti Elders Council Aboriginal Corporation.

After six months under special administration, control of the Elders Council reverts to a new board from today.

Yesterday the seven new board members met to vote in a new chairperson, vice chair, treasurer and secretary.

The new directors are all Dunghutti descendants and members of the Elders Council, but not all hail from Kempsey.

Outgoing special administrator Tim Gumbleton from RSM Bird Cameron said the changes to the corporation in the past six months had been marked.

"We've resolved the litigation, minimised the legal costs and were able to appoint a strong board to further the interests of the Dunghutti people," he said.

"We've drawn up a new rule book following a number of consultation sessions with an advisory committee and the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations,

and that has been voted on by the 23 members who nominated for a position on the board.

“It’s a fairer, more transparent corporation and hopefully these changes will lead to a more active and happier membership.

“Dunghutti is all the same family, it’s just a matter of getting back together.”

The rule changes, registered with ORIC on February 24, mean directors are no longer able to be employees of the corporation and are not entitled to remuneration or gifts.

The corporation rules allow for a maximum of nine directors, with provision for two non-member directors.

Aspiring directors must provide a one-page consent form disclosing personal details and previous experience before they can be considered eligible for a position on the board.

There can be no more than one director from an immediate family and all directors must undertake governance training.

Directors will receive an honorarium of \$750 a year for travel and other similar expenses that will be paid in arrears.

Former directors who were in charge of the corporation before the special administration are not eligible for a place on the board for a period of at least five years.

“The former directors will stay as members and that rule change is probably one of the things they’re not particularly happy about,” Mr Gumbleton said.

Financially, the corporation has a tick over \$3.2 million in its bank accounts - the remaining funds from the \$6.1 million Native Title payout made by the State government in February 2010.

The majority of the funds will remain secure in Trust.

“The board is permitted to spend up to a maximum of the interest earned from the Trust funds in the year prior,” Mr Gumbleton said.

“That means if there was \$150,000 of interest earned from the previous year, the board is entitled to spend that money.”

Any spend above that limit will require special approval from 75 per cent of the Elders Council members.

Similarly, a single spend of more than \$20,000 by the board will require approval from 50 per cent of members.

Since the period of special administration started in September last year, the Elders Council has welcomed 70 new members, bringing the total membership to 399.

Two further applications were to be considered at the first meeting of the new board, while six more are being held by the corporation.

Becoming a member has been simplified and a new membership form drawn up. Any Aboriginal person over the age of 18 who is of Dunghutti descent is now able to become a member.

To avoid disputes the corporation has included a list of 15 Dunghutti ancestors in its rule book as determined by the Federal Court during the handing down of its Native Title determination in 1997.

Membership applicants who are unable to link their ancestry to those 15 people will need to seek further advice through organisations such as NTS Corp to establish their genealogy.

The proxy voting system adopted by the corporation has also changed.

Previously members and non-members were allowed a maximum of three proxy votes. Now members are permitted just one proxy vote.